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Security Council

Seventy-second year

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Wednesday, 26 July 2017, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in Burundi

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Burundi

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Burundi to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Michel Kafando, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi, and His Excellency Mr. Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations, in his capacity as the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kafando.

Mr. Kafando: I would like to start by congratulating you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

It is an honour for me to address the Security Council in my capacity as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the first time. As members are aware, the facilitator of the East African Community, former President Benjamin Mkapa, was scheduled to brief the Council with me. Because of a health-related issue, he could not be here today. I wish him a speedy recovery.

My briefing will focus on three aspects: first, my meetings in Bujumbura; secondly, my preliminary assessment of the situation in Burundi; and thirdly, a possible way forward.

(*spoke in French*)

When I arrived in Bujumbura on 27 June, I was received in turn by the Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation, Mr Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, and by the President, Pierre Nkurunziza. I spent approximately an hour talking alone with President Nkurunziza. My meeting with the President was essentially a courtesy visit. In Bujumbura I also met with various Burundian political stakeholders — representatives of civil society and religious groups and members of the diplomatic corps, as well as of the United Nations family.

In Tanzania, I was received by former the President and facilitator of the inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, East Africa, Regional and International Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mr. Mahiga. The facilitator said that he had concluded his work for which the report had been sent to President Museveni, the chief mediator of the inter-Burundi dialogue.

In Addis Ababa, I also conducted talks on the sidelines of the African Union Summit with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uganda and African leaders — namely, the current Chairperson of the African Union, Mr. Alpha Condé, as well as with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Moussa Faki — who are closely following the situation in Burundi.

I have just briefly listed the contacts with whom I met within the framework of my first trip to Burundi and the subregion. I imagine that members are now wondering what assessment I took away from those various meetings and exchanges. Based on those meetings, there appear to be divergent assessments of the political situation that prevails in the country. The Burundian authorities are confident in their ability to conduct the country's affairs in serenity. They consider that the general situation is calm, while condemning foreign interference in the management of their internal affairs and recalling their commitment to maintaining their national sovereignty.

The representatives of the political opposition and some civil society members are concerned about what they deem to be abuse of power by the current Government. They are calling, therefore, for greater involvement by the region and the international community to promote an inclusive dialogue, without preconditions, in which all Burundians take part. They are calling for the suspension of the constitutional review process under way and for an end to violations of their basic rights and the hostility of the authorities towards those rights, which often go hand in hand, they claim, with suppression by the forces maintaining order and by Government-affiliated groups. However, political parties and civil society organizations that

support the Government have a completely different point of view.

The economic situation continues to worsen because of the tense political environment, which in turn deters private national and international investors. There is unemployment, in particular among young people. That situation causes people to leave for neighbouring countries, thereby increasing the number of refugees.

The security situation has improved since the beginning of the year. In Bujumbura, all appears calm and people freely go about their work. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there have been grenade attacks over the past few weeks that have left many people dead and injured. The reasons for those attacks have not yet been made clear.

People want an atmosphere of peace in Burundi, but under what conditions and at what price might that be achieved? The first requirement must be to give priority to inclusive dialogue, a sine qua non for any settlement of the crisis. It is imperative for the Burundian Government to acquiesce to the insistent demands of the countries of the subregion and of the African Union — which are supported in this by the United Nations — to move to an inclusive dialogue that would include members of the opposition in exile and those in the country. I believe that that is the price to be paid if we are to restore trust among Burundians, to ensure credible, stable and democratic institutions and to promote genuine national reconciliation. From that perspective, the Arusha Agreement must remain the reference standard, the cornerstone. All non-governmental stakeholders with whom I have met have acknowledged that, have demanded that.

The new prospects and guidelines that we must develop to resolve the situation in Burundi must converge, it seems to me, toward joint, collective action by African leaders, first by those in the subregion, in solidarity with the United Nations. Such joint collective action must be aimed at convincing the Burundian regime to accept appeasement measures, in particular those put forward by the Facilitator and the more general measures featured in the Arusha Agreement.

Joint action must also be geared towards encouraging the Burundian regime to participate in the inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue. The recent visit paid by President Nkurunziza to President Magufuli of Tanzania is an encouraging sign in that regard. Let us hope that that gesture indicates a willingness to move the inclusive dialogue process forward. It is for that reason that, in my capacity as Special Envoy, and now that many high-ranking African officials have decided to personally and fully take part in the resolving the crisis, I suggest that more discernment be brought to the analysis of the Burundi question.

As you know, Mr. President, I am on my first fact-finding mission, and I intend to continue consultations in the coming days. I truly believe in the subregion's commitment to working for peace in Burundi, with the support of the African Union. I strongly recommend that the United Nations firmly support those efforts. Even if a bit more patience is required, we will certainly reach a dynamic compromise. I repeat that all of our efforts must demonstrate unwavering support for the region and in particular the efforts of the Mediator and Facilitator and those of the Government of Tanzania.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Kafando for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lauber.

Mr. Lauber: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Council on the latest activities of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). As usual, the following statement was submitted to and approved by the members of the configuration, including the country concerned, Burundi.

From 10 to 13 July, I undertook my fifth visit to Burundi as Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, concentrating this time on socioeconomic cooperation. The main objectives of my visit were, first, to pursue the dialogue on the socioeconomic situation and international cooperation with the Government and its partners in Burundi; secondly, to insist on the relevance of the dialogue process led by the East African Community (EAC) and to refer to the large support it enjoys among the States Members of the United Nations; and thirdly, to have a first-hand impression of the developments in the country.

I would like to start my briefing with a word of thanks to the Government of Burundi for its hospitality and confidence and to Ambassador Albert Shingiro, the Permanent Representative of Burundi, for his support in organizing the visit. During my visit of 10 to 13 July, I was received by the President of the Republic

of Burundi, the Minister for External Relations, the Minister of Finance and the Secretary General of the ruling party, the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie. I also held numerous meetings with Burundi's international partners, namely, with representatives of the member States of the Configuration. Furthermore, I met His Excellency Mr. Michel Kafando, the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General; His Excellency Mr. François Fall, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Central Africa; His Excellency Mr. Ibrahima Fall, the Special Envoy of the African Union; and representatives of the private sector and the United Nations country team. On 12 July, I participated in a retreat, which was organized by the Minister for External Relations and dedicated to the socioeconomic situation in Burundi.

All in all, the city of Bujumbura made a lively impression when I was there, and the security situation seemed calm. However, during my stay, some cases of violence were reported. I also continued to hear reports about the prevalence of a climate of fear and repression. The importance of the EAC-led dialogue and interaction among political parties was highlighted by many interlocutors, including the Secretary General of the ruling party. Most interlocutors also welcomed the dialogue initiative with Burundi's political parties, which had been launched earlier this year by Burundi's ombudsman. Many interlocutors characterized the economic situation as deteriorating and gave examples on how that development affects them personally.

Burundi's international partners described the broad range of their engagement with Burundi, which reaches from humanitarian assistance to structural support for the health service and investments in the energy sector. At the same time, they are confronted with certain obstacles to their cooperation, such as accessibility to foreign currency, the lack of reliable data and the restrictive law on non-governmental organizations and others.

A key event during my visit was the socioeconomic retreat I mentioned, which took place on 12 July. That retreat was the latest stage in the ongoing socioeconomic dialogue that the PBC Burundi Configuration had launched in November 2016 near Geneva, in cooperation with the then Resident Coordinator, with consultations among Burundi's main multilateral partners: the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank. In March 2017, I had participated in a meeting between the Government and United Nations agencies in Bujumbura, which focused on the socioeconomic challenges in the areas of agriculture and food security, health and education. In the context of that March meeting, the Government had expressed its wish to organize a retreat with partners in Bujumbura on the challenges in the same three sectors in summer 2017.

Besides the Chair of the PBC Burundi configuration, the Foreign Minister had invited Mr. Garry Conille, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Burundi, representatives of several United Nations agencies, the World Bank and the African Development Bank in Burundi to the retreat on 12 July. Government participation also included the Minister for Agriculture; representatives of the Second Vice-Presidency; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Public Health; the Ministry of Finance; and the National Platform for Risk Prevention and Disaster Management. The main objective of the retreat was to specify the main socioeconomic challenges in the three priority areas of agriculture, education, and health and to discuss possible responses.

In his opening remarks, the Foreign Minister suggested that we focus on the most urgent needs of the population and emphasized the readiness of the Government to engage in a dialogue with its partners. In my statement, I situated the socioeconomic dialogue in the broader peacebuilding engagement of the PBC, and underlined that sustainable peace is not possible if we do not advance simultaneously within all three pillars of United Nations engagement: peace and security, socioeconomic development, and human rights.

Macroeconomic analysis was not the main focus of the event, but the indicators cited during the retreat showed that the situation remains concerning. For instance, the Central Bank of the Republic of Burundi rated headline inflation at 21.1 per cent for March, driven mainly by a rise in food prices of 34 per cent.

Allow me to provide a few examples of the socioeconomic and humanitarian challenges and of the recommendations that were reflected in a joint summary at the end of the retreat.

In the agricultural sector, the participants identified low productivity, the impact of climate change, insufficient infrastructure for stockpiling and transportation for agricultural products, the lack of

mechanization in the sector, the lack of fertilizers, and plant diseases among the main challenges. In response, the participants recommended measures such as the agro-industrial transformation of agricultural products, additional investments and addressing the problem of land scarcity.

The continuing malaria epidemic was a priority subject among health experts. Other challenges include the high mortality of mothers and small children, HIV/AIDS, demographic growth and malnutrition. The participants concluded that additional qualified staff and financial resources, better access to health data and a range of other measures could help to meet the current challenges.

The educational sector is facing challenges such as insufficient school infrastructure and a lack of school material and teachers, and 46 per cent of school-age children are currently not attending school. According to the participants, additional resources would be needed to train teachers, improve infrastructure, build additional school canteens, produce textbooks and strengthen the peacebuilding perspectives in school education.

With regard to the macroeconomic sector, one of the recommendations of the joint conclusions states:

> "In order for the country to gradually achieve a balanced payment, assistance to the budget is needed, for which the Government and its development partners are invited to enter into a dialogue."

Apart from such specific elements, the participants also formulated some general recommendations, such as the need to obtain more reliable socioeconomic and macroeconomic data, to align Burundi's socioeconomic priorities with the Sustainable Development Goals, and to involve Burundi's international partners in the current elaboration of the National Development Plan. One of the recommendations, which the Government and the participating partners noted in their joint summary and which is of particular relevance for the Configuration, states that the socioeconomic dialogue should continue and involve additional partners who were not invited to attend the retreat of 12 July.

On 13 July, the President of the Republic received me in Gitega, the second largest city of the country. He reiterated his appreciation for the efforts of the PBC Burundi Configuration. I thanked him for the cooperation between his Government and the PBC, and informed him about my current engagement and the outcome of the socioeconomic retreat of the previous day. I mentioned that the regional engagement in follow-up to the East African Community (EAC) summit of 20 May and the report by President Mkapa had received very positive feedback from the members of the Configuration, adding that the broadly shared expectation among Member States is that the Government of Burundi fully engages in this process.

The President outlined Burundi's national development efforts, with a particular focus on education, health, agriculture and energy supply, mentioning both the progress achieved and challenges remaining. He made clear that Burundi continues to need international partners and expressed gratitude for the current assistance. He also mentioned the demographic challenges that the country is facing and thanked the United Nations Population Fund in particular for its support in this area.

Furthermore, the meeting with the President was an opportunity for me to raise the questions of national reconciliation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the outstanding memorandums of understanding with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the African Union in relation to the deployment and engagement of human rights and military observers in Burundi.

Based on my latest observations and conversations in Burundi, I have drawn the following conclusions regarding peacebuilding in Burundi.

First, the international community should continue to follow developments in Burundi carefully and take all aspects of the current situation into account.

Secondly, the mediation efforts that President Museveni and President Mkapa are undertaking on behalf of the EAC deserve our full political and technical support. The socioeconomic conversation must complement those efforts and the work by the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Michel Kafando.

Thirdly, a frank and open discussion between the Government and its international partners on socioeconomic cooperation and a conducive environment for effective assistance is necessary in order to improve the economic situation and is thus an essential element of peacebuilding in Burundi. I

therefore intend to pursue the socioeconomic dialogue between the Government of Burundi and its partners.

Fourthly, it is important to pay increased attention to the question of national reconciliation and dealing with the past. I would suggest that the PBC and the Peacebuilding Fund support efforts in this area.

Fifthly, I would like to underline the importance of creating a good environment for the organization of peaceful and democratic elections in 2020, including through the full and equal participation of women.

I would like to conclude my statement by thanking the Security Council for its continued interest and support for the engagement of the PBC in Burundi.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Lauber for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi, Mr. Michel Kafando, and the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Jürg Lauber, for their briefings.

Uruguay notes that since the last briefing of the Council on Burundi (see S/PV.7978), held on 20 June, new events have taken place that in our opinion are positive steps towards a resolution of the crisis in Burundi. One of those steps was Special Envoy Kafando's visit to the country at the end of June, which we hope will help to restore the dynamic of the relationship between the Burundian Government and the United Nations.

Special Envoy Kafando has just given us details about his visit and the nature of the conversations that took place on 27 June. We reiterate our support for his work and hope that in carrying out his tasks, he will involve a broad range of partners, both from the Government and the opposition, as well as from civil society. Furthermore, we acknowledge the constant efforts carried out by the regional and subregional bodies to unblock the political process in Burundi.

In recent summits, both the African Union and the East African Community reaffirmed their full commitment to a peaceful solution to the crisis and underscored that dialogue is the only road possible. We also have a road map that was presented by the facilitator of the inter-Burundian dialogue, former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, which contains a series of specific steps that would help to relaunch the political process and generate conditions for transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections in 2020. In that connection, Uruguay encourages countries in the region to support Burundi in a united and coordinated manner. We also urge all of the Burundian parties to commit to the proposed road map and to work on its implementation as soon as possible, as was mentioned by Ambassador Lauber.

We welcome the successful holding of the socioeconomic retreat on 12 July, which brought together national authorities and several international partners. It identified the main challenges that the country faces in socioeconomic matters and, on that basis, will aid in seeking solutions. Uruguay notes the important role played by the Peacebuilding Commission in those efforts and encourages the continuation over time of the dialogue platform that was created and the involvement of new interested partners.

Uruguay cannot help but reiterate its concern over the deterioration of the human rights situation in Burundi. We strongly condemn each and every one of the abuses and violations in the area of human rights, no matter who committed them. That includes cases of extrajudicial executions, sexual violence in the context of the political crisis, arbitrary arrests and detentions, forced disappearances, and harassment and intimidation of civil society organizations and even journalists, as well as restrictions on fundamental freedoms.

Given the situation, we regret the fact that the Government of Burundi has not yet resumed its cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights since it was suspended in October 2016. We call for the swift conclusion of a memorandum of understanding for the resumption of the Office's activities in Burundi. We also call for full cooperation between the Government to Burundi and the Commission of Investigation on the human rights situation established by the Human Rights Council. Full respect for the human rights of all Burundians is a necessary condition for the holding of an inclusive and credible political dialogue. It is also necessary for the creation of an environment conducive to organizing peaceful and democratic elections in 2020.

Mr. Bessho (Japan) I also thank Special Envoy Michel Kafando and Ambassador Jürg Lauber for their informative briefings.

I would like to focus on two main points regarding Burundi. The first concerns the need to re-establish trust between the Government of Burundi and the international community.

We welcome Special Envoy Kafando's engagement with Burundi and regional Governments. We call on the Government of Burundi to work constructively and cooperatively with the Special Envoy. We fully support the Special Envoy's efforts. We also thank Ambassador Lauber, Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for his proactive role. It exemplifies how usefully the Peacebuilding Commission can support the work of the Council.

A year has passed since the adoption of resolution 2303 (2016), which remains unimplemented. The situation in Burundi remains fragile, and we are concerned by the worsening socioeconomic situation, as well as serious, ongoing human rights violations. In June, our colleague, the Permanent Representative of Burundi, told the Council that a resumed presence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in Burundi was a certainty. Yet, as I see it, there has been no progress on resumed cooperation between the Government of Burundi and UNHCHR. Despite repeated calls by the international community, only a limited number of human rights observers of the African Union (AU) have arrived in Burundi. While the Council has urged the Government of Burundi to cooperate fully with the deployment and activities of the United Nations police component, it has not yet been established. We call on the Government to Burundi to promptly address those concerns.

I believe that the maintenance of cooperative relations with the United Nations, the AU and other international partners is clearly in Burundi's own national interest. A neutral international presence in Burundi would have a very positive effect in building confidence between Burundi and the international community. The Council must act to ensure that presence.

My second point concerns regional efforts on Burundi. We thank President Museveni and President Mkapa for their mediation efforts. Progress on an inclusive national dialogue in advance of the 2020 elections is vital for peace and security in not only Burundi, but also in the wider region as a whole. We call on the Government of Burundi to seriously commit to an inclusive national dialogue without conditions. We also call on the Heads of State in the East African Community (EAC) to further enhance their engagement in the situation in Burundi. In response to the call by our colleague, Ambassador Lauber, I am confident that the Council will continue to support the EAC-mediated dialogue process moving forward.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I would like to thank our briefers, Special Envoy Kafando and Ambassador Lauber, for their insights and efforts made so far to continue negotiations between the Government of Burundi and all stakeholders in the country.

We welcome the recent appointment of Mr Kafando and believe that he will do everything in his power to ease the situation in the country. As we can see from his briefing, during his short but very productive visit, Mr. Kafando was able to establish good working relations with the Government of Burundi and other actors in the country, as well as with regional organizations.

Kazakhstan supports the East African Community-led inter-Burundian dialogue and the work of the Tripartite Joint Commission. We are concerned by slow progress in the political negotiations. We reiterate our call to all parties in the country to actively participate in the dialogue with no preconditions. That process must be supported and reinforced by the regional organizations, including the African Union (AU) and its mission in Burundi, which monitors the overall situation.

We also support the active engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission as a great platform for dialogue between Burundi and all international partners. We welcome the outcome of the socioeconomic retreat, which was recently held in Bujumbura. We urge the Burundian Government to sign the relevant memorandum of understanding with the African Union for the deployment of the rest of the 200 AU military and human rights observers. We also commend the European Union for supporting the deployment of 48 AU observers.

The full implementation of the provisions of the Arusha Agreement is vital to prevent a further escalation of violence and maintain peace and security in the country. It is our hope that all parties in the country

will start to implement the Arusha Agreement. Another round of negotiations will facilitate that process.

Another problem that concerns us is the worsening humanitarian situation, which is affecting the entire Great Lakes region. Its causes are not just political; there are other reasons, such as a poor macroeconomic situation and drought. In that connection we call upon the international community to continue supporting all of the regional States that are hosting Burundian refugees. Humanitarian actors must further scale up their response in order to meet the needs of nearly 3 million people in the region.

In conclusion, I would like to express our firm belief that the political sovereignty and integrity of Burundi must be preserved in strict compliance with the principles of international law. Also, it is critically important that the Government of Burundi maintains a political dialogue with the United Nations and its agencies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and all other members of the international community.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia welcomes the briefings provided by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Michel Kafando, and the Ambassador of Switzerland, Mr. Jürg Lauber, Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Bolivia commends the mediation carried out by the former President of Tanzania, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, and the President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Museveni, with respect to the Arusha Accords and the Burundian Constitution. Bolivia once again encourages all parties to support that mediation process and to work together to achieve a negotiated political settlement.

We agree with the past statements of Mr. Mkapa to the effect that, if the peace process is to be successful, all parties must work on confidence-building measures and constructive dialogue in good faith. In that respect, we encourage and acknowledge the efforts of the joint working group, the East African Community and the team from the Office of the Special Envoy, and the work of the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. Similarly, we encourage the parties to implement the road map proposed by Mr. Mkapa, based on the spirit of peace of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi.

We welcome the positive outcome of the recent meeting in Bujumbura convened by the Special Envoy and the authorities of Burundi, including President Pierre Nkurunziza, in which they agreed to continue the inter-Burundian dialogue in an inclusive environment. We also welcome the decision by the African Union at its twenty-ninth summit, held 27 June to 4 July in Addis Ababa, to reaffirm its commitment to a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Burundi through a swift resumption of the inter-Burundian dialogue under the stewardship of the East African Community, with the support of the African Union.

Likewise, we take note of the retreat on 12 July, in which the Government met with various international partners to assess the current challenges facing the country in the macroeconomic sphere, in agriculture, health, education, risk prevention and disaster management, with a view to working on the country's socioeconomic recovery. We commend the work of the Government of Burundi and the country's Ombudsman for their awareness-raising efforts to facilitate refugees returning to their country, and we encourage them to pursue that objective.

Bolivia urges that actions in the negotiating process in future continue to be carried out in a progressive manner and in coordination with the country's authorities, including, inter alia, coordination of the presence of the observers and the United Nations police component in accordance with resolution 2303 (2016), if future security conditions so require. We reiterate that coordination must be carried out in respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Burundi, observing the obligation of States to provide security and protection for their citizens.

Given the complexity of the process, it is our firm belief that it is vital to continue solidifying the foundations to ensure definitive stability in Burundi, through initiatives that may be needed and with the full and committed support of the international community, based on the framework of law, justice, reconciliation and peace.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Burundi.

Mr. Shingiro (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time that I am speaking under your presidency, Sir, I wish to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for the invaluable support that your country, the

People's Republic of China, continues to provide to African countries in general and to my country, Burundi, in particular, especially in terms of respect for the sacred principles and values of our common Organization. We are very grateful for that.

Allow me also to thank the other members of the Council for their ongoing support for Burundi's sovereignty and political independence since the outbreak of the insurrectional movement in 2015 and the attempted coup d'état on 13 May 2015.

My thanks also go to Ambassador Jürg Lauber, Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) — who, as he noted, has just returned from a field visit to Burundi from 10 to 13 July — for his ever-increasing role in mobilizing resources in support of Burundi's socioeconomic sector.

I hasten to welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Michel Kafando, who has just provided his first briefing to the Council since his appointment as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and his first visit to Burundi, from the end of June to the beginning of this month.

In my statement, I shall stress the political, security and human rights situation. I shall also say a word about freedom of expression, refugees and reconciliation, as well as the efforts of the Government of Burundi to rebuild the frayed confidence of some of its development partners.

With regard to the political situation, I am pleased to inform the Council that the inter-Burundian political dialogue process is ongoing, with some progress made. The dialogue has not stalled, as some people would have us believe; it is following an evolutionary path. The internal process, which was led by the Government-established National Commission for the Inter-Burundian Dialogue has ended and a final report has been sent to the national authorities. The recommendations of the report are the result of a dialogue involving more than 26,000 Burundians, and they will be combined with the conclusions of the dialogue process at the subregional level to eventually produce a solid road map for peaceful elections in 2020.

Meanwhile, another promising dynamic of internal dialogue among all stakeholders is ongoing under the facilitation of the Burundian Ombudsman. It is following a positive trajectory and has already organized several inclusive dialogue workshops with our partners in Bujumbura. All of those processes complement each other without competition, thereby strengthening the culture of dialogue in our country.

We remain convinced that by strengthening democracy in a country like ours, which is still working to build peace, justice and security, there is no solid pillar on which the rule of law can rely other than the holding of free, peaceful and transparent elections. Any alternative attempts to take power through unconstitutional shortcuts are unacceptable and will go nowhere.

The coups d'état that Burundians have experienced in the past represent the nightmare that they are trying to wake up from today. Since the democratic elections of 2005, that dark chapter of our history has closed, a hopeful one has opened and we are gradually building a culture of democracy, despite a number of new challenges that we still have to tackle. That is why our President has asked Burundi's political parties, which today number around 30, to regroup, conduct an in-depth review of their internal policies on unity and discipline and raise awareness among their militant adherents about the importance of remaining united and respecting democratic principles. He has advised them to totally reject divisiveness, refrain from any provocations or manoeuvres that could goad them into murdering one another on the pretext that they have different political or social affiliations and, as far as possible, avoid polluting Burundi's ever-changing political space.

In that regard, the President has asked civil-society groups to refrain from involvement in political affairs and from deeds or words that could sow division and dissension of any kind or become an incitement to killing such as we saw during the insurrection in 2015. Rather, he urged them to concern themselves with the welfare of the population, including by giving support to his efforts to restore society and community. He also appealed to religious leaders to continue with the mission that God has entrusted to them by preaching the gospel throughout the country and refraining from political acts that could turn them away from the path of righteousness, and encouraged them to continue to get involved in the country's development efforts and in the promotion of human rights and the values of ubuntu in Burundi.

With regard to constitutional matters, we should recall that this issue is exclusively in the domain of

national sovereignty and should be discussed only within a national framework. As the Council is aware, no one has the right to deprive the Burundian people of their sovereign right to define a political future that suits them and is tailored to their needs, and that applies to all the peoples we represent here.

Turning to the issue of security, we all know that it is central to every issue, since no development is possible without peace and security, and vice versa. Burundians are devoted to peace and equality and are absolutely determined in their commitment to safeguarding peace night and day. Our country is now calm, as all those who spoke here this morning have acknowledged. Peace and security re,_ ,, thanks to excellent cooperation between the forces of law and order, the Administration and the people. Where anything else is concerned, we all know that ordinary criminality is as old as humankind, and like everyone else, Burundi has to deal with it every day.

On the human rights front, it is generally agreed that no country in the world is so perfect in this area that it is in a position to lecture others about it. Just like other countries, and in what we should remind the Council is an especially difficult post-crisis environment, Burundi is continuing its efforts to promote human rights and ensure that they are protected. We firmly believe, and will continue to insist, that only international cooperation and a mutually beneficial partnership that respects the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations can make an effective contribution to the genuine protection of human rights in Burundi or anywhere else. Excessive or selective political pressure should give way to cooperation and dialogue. My country has promised to continue working to make progress and improve its cooperation with all good-faith actors in this area.

We cannot speak of the state of human rights without mentioning the prison situation. We have taken steps to reduce crowding in the prisons and, more recently, to promote national reconciliation. The President has ordered the release of more than 2,500 prisoners, in addition to the 3,416 released in 2015, the 6,136 in 2016 and, very recently, the 2,247 in 2017 from among the 2,500 who, as the Council is aware, received a presidential pardon at the end of 2016, a commendable measure that deserves the Council's support and to be recognized as a gesture of peace for Burundians.

With regard to the freedom of the press — and contrary to the pronouncements of various politicians and journalists who, as the Council is aware, describe Burundi as they wish it to be rather than as it is — the Government of Burundi has never shut down any private media outlets. Of the three or four private media outlets that were partially destroyed in the wake of the foiled coup d'état of 13 May 2015, two have already reopened and the others are functioning normally. Today more than 20 national and international private radio stations are broadcasting freely in Burundi, and we will continue working to improve things in an area that is so essential to the promotion of democracy in our country. We are trying as best we can to find a good balance between the protection of human rights and the consolidation of the rule of law. We are also pleased about the fact that no journalists are imprisoned in our country, contrary to what we see elsewhere.

With regard to refugees, our Head of State has asked the Burundi Ombudsman to continue with efforts to raise awareness among refugees and non-violent political actors about returning home in order to prepare for the 2020 election deadlines. We know that the repatriation of refugees is a marker of subregional stability, and it has now been admitted that some of those who fled the country, including minors, were recruited, trained, supervised and enrolled in anti-Burundi rebel movements, all of it in flagrant violation of the Charter, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region of 24 February 2013. During his visit to Tanzania last week, the President and his counterpart in the United Republic of Tanzania made a heartfelt appeal to refugees to return to their homeland. I should emphasize that they also appealed to organizations dealing with refugees to avoid any deliberate exaggeration of their numbers and to acknowledge that more than 150,000 refugees have already returned to Burundi. In that regard, we call on countries that are hosting refugees — and which I would like to thank, incidentally — and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees to cooperate fully in order to facilitate their voluntary return home, since some of them have been held hostage for purely political and business purposes or to maintain or fuel a crisis situation that is increasingly more artificial than real.

In addition to the return of refugees, the two Heads of State exchanged views on strengthening bilateral relations, intensifying trade among the two peoples, security on shared borders and the situation in the region overall. They welcomed the Tanzanian railway project linking Tanzania, Burundi and other countries in the region. The visit also was a testament to the interest that the Heads of State of the region attach to the regional dimension, which is crucial because we have observed in some areas that there is an increasingly wide gap between the positions of some regional actors and the positions of actors in New York. Regional actors need to be listened to. They are the ones who know us and know about our history and culture. They need to have their views heard when decisions are taken, regardless of the context.

With regard to national reconciliation, the Government of Burundi, under the enlightened leadership of President Nkurunziza, set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which, as the Council is aware, marks the final stage in the establishment of the institutions provided for in the 2000 Arusha Agreement. The members of the Commission were called upon to promptly inform the Burundian people of the successes and failures of the past with a view to definitively turning the page on the politico-ethnic antagonisms that have punctuated the dark history of our country, and thereby build a bright future for present and future generations.

As a complement, last week the National Assembly of Burundi adopted a draft law on the functioning of the National Council for National Unity and Reconciliation, which is a very important body. That Council will be composed of seven individuals of integrity and will reconcile the Burundian people — with the aim of unity and equity — and will be at the forefront in upholding the Burundian values of ubuntu, ubushingantahe, hbugabo and hbupfasoni: all positive values inherent in the Burundian people.

At the macroeconomic level, the balance of payments was to an extent impacted by the unilateral suspension of external direct support by some partners. In order for the country to gradually achieve balance, as the Chair of the Burundi configuration mentioned, the retreat held in Bujumbura on 12 July, which included the Government and its multilateral partners and United Nations agencies present in Burundi, recommended the provision of direct budgetary support. The Government and development partners have been invited to engage in a sincere and frank dialogue on this topic with a view to surmounting the obstacles that persist in terms of cooperation between Burundi and some countries.

As far as cooperation with our partners is concerned — and several peakers mentioned this today — we greatly value our partners. Any improvement in our relations with them is most welcome. Representatives are certainly aware that recently the Burundian Government has been working for a resumption of peaceful relations with its partners, and with the United Nations in particular. In order to mend our relations with the United Nations, Burundi expeditiously consented to the visit of the visit of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in late June and early July. During his visit, the Special Envoy, and he can attest to this, enjoyed the legendary hospitality of the Burundian people and the full cooperation of national authorities, which enabled him to carry out his mission in Burundi. We expect that, given his experience in diplomacy, that his reports will uphold the principles, practices and values of the United Nations and, above all, the aspirations of the Burundian people for a political future that suits them and is tailored to their needs. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, who visited Burundi at the same time, benefited from the same degree of cooperation, attention and hospitality, both in Bujumbura and the countryside.

Negotiations on a new, mutually agreed host country agreement will enable cooperation to be resumed between the Government of Burundi and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which many speakers alsoreferred to this at this meeting. That dialogue is under way. We anticipate that we wil meet in the next few weeks to finalize the text to guide our cooperation, which we hope will proceed normally. As I said at the previous meeting (see S/PV.7978), keeping the Office's presence in Burundi is no longer a concern. I assure the Council that that has already been determined, and the Council can count of Burundi's commitment in that regard. The only thing left to do is to finalize the text. We call for flexibility on the part of all parties in order to reach a successful outcome to the discussions. I would point out that these are discussions between two parties.

Similarly, military and human rights observers of the African Union are already deployed on the ground in Burundi and are working freely without

any hindrance. They enjoy the full cooperation of the Burundian Government and all its services, including those of national sovereignty, which certain countries, as representatives are aware, would not extend to foreign observers. With regard to the deployment of additional observers, the obstacles pertain to the African Union and are budgetary in nature. We therefore call on partners to support the African Union to enable it to deploy additional observers. Burundi is very open and the observers currently on the ground are working normally. We will continue to work together to overcome any obstacles in their path in an amicable way.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.